

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Disability Research Institute Request for Applications (RFA) (Program Announcement No. SSA-ORES-00-1)

AGENCY: The Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES), Office of Policy, Social Security Administration (SSA).

ACTION: Request for applications for a cooperative agreement to establish a Disability Research Institute (DRI).

SUMMARY: The Social Security Administration's disability programs play a vital role in society, paying benefits to over 8 million disabled individuals. It is essential that the nation invest in research designed to examine the disability programs and ensure that these programs are designed effectively to improve the lives of disabled Americans. The Social Security Administration plans to establish a Disability Research Institute (DRI). This institute would help fill the need for more extensive research in the disability area for policymakers around the country. The DRI is an important initiative on the part of SSA's Office of Policy to strengthen the Agency's research capacity since it became independent in 1995.

Authorized under Section 1110 of the Social Security Act, SSA announces the solicitation of applications for a cooperative agreement to create a DRI in order to inform the public and policymakers about disability policy alternatives and their consequences. Initially, we anticipate the Institute will be one, university-based, multi-disciplinary center. The Institute will have an annual budget consisting of \$1.25 million for the first year and \$1 million per year for subsequent years. SSA expects to fund this Institute for a period of 5 years, contingent upon a successful annual review process, continued funding availability and continued relevance to SSA initiatives.

The grantee is strongly encouraged to collaborate with SSA's and other government-related research and development activities to avoid duplication of research. After award, SSA will help identify such activities and their funding agencies and facilitate any collaboration as necessary.

PURPOSE: This announcement seeks applications to establish a DRI that will serve as a national resource fostering high quality research, communication, and education. The Institute's program purpose is to benefit the public through four tasks:

- (1) Research and evaluation The DRI will be expected to plan, initiate, and maintain a research program of high caliber. There will be special emphasis on research that will inform the debate on disability policy.
- (2) Dissemination The DRI will develop resources to inform the academic community, policymakers, and the public on issues concerning disability policy.
- (3) Training and education The DRI will develop a professional training program including, but not limited to, graduate and postgraduate education; intramural exchanges; and formal instruction of policymakers which focuses on the issues of disability policy.
- (4) Facilitation of data usage The DRI will facilitate research using SSA administrative data.

DATES: The closing date for submitting applications under this announcement is (insert date 90 days after the date of publication in the Federal Register.)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To request an application kit, and for general (nonprogrammatic) information regarding the announcement or application package contact: E. Joe Smith, Grants Management Officer, SSA, Office of Acquisition and Grants, Grants Management Team, 1-E-4 Gwynn Oak Building, 1710 Gwynn Oak Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21207-5279. The fax number is (410) 966-9310. The telephone numbers are E. Joe Smith, (410) 965-9503 (e-mail: joe.smith@ssa.gov), or Dave Allshouse, (410) 965-9262 (e-mail: daveallshouse@ssa.gov), or Gary Stammer, (410) 965-9501 (e-mail: gary.stammer@ssa.gov). For information on the program content of the announcement/application, contact: Paula Laird, Project Officer, SSA, ORES, 6401 Security Blvd., 4-C-15 Operations Building, Baltimore, Maryland 21235. The fax number is (410) 965-3308. The telephone numbers are (410) 965-9243 (e-mail: paula.laird@ssa.gov), or Nelson Rambath, Alternate Project Officer, (410) 965-2396 (e-mail: nelson.rambath@ssa.gov).

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

PART I--SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

B. Type of Award

C. Availability and Duration of Funding

D. Letter of Intent

PART II--ESTABLISHMENT OF A DISABILITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE--
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INSTITUTE AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

A. Priority Research Areas

B. Cooperative Agreement Responsibilities

1. Institute Responsibilities

2. SSA Responsibilities

3. Joint Responsibilities

C. Special Requirements

PART III--APPLICATION PREPARATION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

A. Content and Organization of Technical Application

B. Review Process and Funding

C. Selection Process and Evaluation Criteria

PART IV--APPLICATION FORMS, COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION

A. Availability of Application Forms

B. Components of a Complete Application

C. Application Submission

D. Notification

PART I--SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

SSA seeks applications from domestic universities or other post-secondary degree granting entities. For-profit organizations may apply with the understanding that no cooperative agreement funds may be paid as profit to any cooperative agreement recipient. Profit is considered as any amount in excess of the allowable costs of the award recipient.

In accordance with an amendment to the Lobbying Disclosure Act, popularly known as the Simpson-Craig Amendment, those entities organized under section 501(c)4 of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying are prohibited from receiving Federal cooperative agreement awards.

B. Type of Award

All awards made under this program will be made in the form of cooperative agreements. A cooperative agreement, as opposed to a grant, anticipates substantial involvement between SSA and the awardee during the performance of the project. A comprehensive annual review process will allow SSA to evaluate, recommend changes, and approve the Institute's activities. This involvement may include collaboration or participation by SSA in the activities of the Institute as determined at the time of award. The terms of award are in addition to, not in lieu of, otherwise applicable guidelines and procedures.

C. Availability and Duration of Funding

1. ORES has available \$1.25 million to fund the initial 12-month budget period of a proposed five-year cooperative agreement pursuant to this announcement. (Additional funding up to \$1 million per year for related projects, as requested by SSA, might become available from SSA for further support of the Institute selected under this announcement.)

2. Applicants must include separate budget estimates for each of the five years, if they expect funding levels to be substantially different in subsequent years.

3. The amount of funds available for the cooperative agreement in future years has not been established. Legislative support for continued funding of the Institute cannot be guaranteed and funding is subject to future appropriations and approval by the Commissioner. SSA expects, however, that the Institute will be supported during future fiscal years at an annual level of \$1 million.

4. The Institute should prepare a five-year proposal with a maximum budget of \$5.25 million.

5. Additional funds up to \$1 million per year may become available from SSA and/or other Federal agencies (through co-funding) in support of the Institute's projects.

6. Initial awards, pursuant to this announcement, will be made on or about (insert date 180 days after the date of Publication in the Federal Register).

7. The awardee shall share in the cost of the project. SSA will not provide total funding to the Institute. Recipients of an SSA cooperative agreement are required to contribute a non-Federal match of at least 5 percent toward the total approved cost of the project. The total approved cost of the project is the sum of the Federal share (maximum of 95 percent) and the non-Federal share

(minimum of 5 percent). The non-Federal share may be cash or in-kind (property or services) contributions.

Although one award is anticipated, nothing in this announcement restricts SSA's ability to make more than one award, to make an award of lesser amount, or to add additional entities, institutions or universities to the Disability Research Institute in the future.

D. Letter of Intent

Prospective applicants are asked to submit by (insert date 45 days after date of publication in Federal Register), a letter of intent that includes (1) this program announcement number and title; (2) a brief description of the proposed Institute; (3) the name, postal and e-mail addresses, and the telephone and fax numbers of the Institute's Director; and (4) the identities of the key personnel and participating institutions. The letter of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The sole purpose of the letter of intent is to allow SSA staff to estimate the potential review workload and avoid conflicts of interest in the review. The letter of intent should be sent to: DRI Letter of Intent, Social Security Administration, Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics, Division of Disability Research, 6401 Security Blvd., 4-C-15 Operations Bldg., Baltimore MD 21235.

PART II--ESTABLISHMENT OF A DISABILITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE --
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INSTITUTE AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

A. Priority Research Areas

The Institute should focus on several themes or research areas directly relevant to developing or improving policy related to people with disabilities. Research will be done from existing data sources, and will not include development of surveys or demonstration projects.

The successful applicant shall develop and conduct a research program directed towards people with disabilities that also appropriately balances development of training, information dissemination and data usage facilitation activities. The research approach should relate, in broad terms, to the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. The purpose of these activities is to promote greater understanding of disability policy and its current and future impact on youth, the working-aged and the near-retirement aged segments of the disabled population. The research should address these individuals at all socioeconomic levels, but with particular emphasis on the poor and the near poor.

SSA has identified three priority research areas within the realm of disability policy on which applicants should focus and applications will be scored. These areas include:

1. The Interrelationship Between and Potential Impacts on: (1) Advancements in Technology and Medicine, (2) the Requirements of Work, (3) the SSDI and SSI Programs; and Persons with Disabilities This includes, but is not limited to:

- Trends in the nature of disability and the composition of the disabled population (e.g., types of impairments, the extended reliance of disabled adolescents and adults on disability income security programs and increases in the volume of disability benefit awards to younger persons);
- Changes in technology, the labor market and the nature of work; and the potential effects of these changes on work disability in the future; and
- Types of assistance from public programs that could be made available to persons with disabilities to help them sustain a maximum level of independence.

2. The Effects of Rehabilitation and Other Support Services on: The Proportion of Persons With Disabilities Who Continue Working or Reenter the Workforce, and the Effects on the SSDI and SSI Programs This includes, but is not limited to:

- Relationship of treatment (e.g., improving functioning via social, vocational, medical treatment; compliance with prescribed treatment; identifying persons who might benefit from appropriate treatment, etc.) to return-to-work of persons with disabilities.

- Employment strategies (e.g., methods of early intervention for persons with disabilities, providing short-term or interim disability payments, job accommodations, case management, etc.) that may influence the work patterns of persons with disabilities;
- The interaction of rehabilitation and other support services (including Vocational Rehabilitation and Unemployment Insurance Benefits), the effects of individual motivation and the availability of work on the decisions of persons with disabilities to maintain employment or to apply for SSDI and SSI benefits; and
- Effectiveness of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services (e.g., the best point in time during the course of disability to provide VR, usefulness and shortcomings of VR in assisting persons with disabilities to maintain their current job or be retrained for new work, awareness and utilization of VR services by persons with disabilities, success of VR relative to disability diagnosis, etc.)

3. The Interaction Between and Impact on: Medical, Functional and Occupational Factors; and Disability Determinations for Purposes of Entitlement to SSDI and SSI Benefits This includes, but is not limited to:

- Current and future methods of measuring function and comparisons between current and future functional requirements of work;
- Occupational demand constructs to replace the Department of Labor's Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which is currently used to measure occupational demands in SSA's disability decision process;
- Characteristics of individuals with borderline and severe mental and physical impairments who work; and
- Barriers to employment for persons with mental impairments.

The Institute will develop and disseminate knowledge about these and related issues. SSA realizes competent analysis of all priority research areas may be beyond the capacity of any one Institute and thus the Institute may wish to focus its resources and expertise on a subset of the areas listed above. Similarly, the Institute may choose to concentrate on a few aspects of the priority research areas more strongly than others. The goal of the Institute is to address a range of objectives discussed above without compromising the overall quality of research in the separate priority areas.

B. Cooperative Agreement Responsibilities

1. Institute Responsibilities: The Institute will perform the following tasks:

a. Research and evaluation The Institute has a primary and lead responsibility to define objectives and approaches and will be expected to plan, initiate, and maintain a research program of high caliber. It must meet the tests of social science rigor and objectivity. The research will use state-of-the-art research methodology and have practical application to timely disability policy issues. The program will strive for respect from the academic and policy communities (over a broad range of the political spectrum) for its scientific quality, fairness, and policy relevance.

The research program should include supporting the work of members of the DRI staff and other affiliated researchers. In addition, it should provide intellectual leadership in the national research community by establishing links with a broad range of other scholars and organizations through programs such as visiting and postdoctoral appointments, research assistantships, and a limited

program of nonresident grants, for example. Collaboration between the Institute and SSA researchers is encouraged, as it is with other organizations interested in disability policy.

The research program should include multi-disciplinary approaches to increase understanding of the issues beyond what is possible from analysis within the framework of a single discipline. The staff would include competency-relevant disciplines such as economics, sociology, public health policy/administration, demography, physiology, occupational taxonomy, actuarial science, labor management etc.

Planning and execution of the research program shall always consider the policy implications of research findings. However, it also is appropriate, for example, to engage in activities to make advances in research techniques. SSA will form an internal Technical Assistance Panel (See Part II, SSA Responsibilities) to review and concur with the research agenda and other DRI products to assure policy relevance, utility, and scope. In addition, a group of nationally recognized scholars and practitioners (See Part II, Joint Responsibilities) shall periodically review the research agenda to assure its policy relevance, utility, and scope.

Occasionally, Institute staff will be expected to comment on SSA research plans, provide critical commentary on research products, perform statistical policy analyses, and other quick-response activities to inform SSA's research, evaluation, and policy analysis function. In addition, the Institute Director may be asked to aid in the development of SSA's internal research priorities.

b. Dissemination Making knowledge and information available to the academic and policy communities, as well as the public (both beneficiaries and contributors), is to be another integral feature of the Institute's responsibilities. The DRI will facilitate the process of translating basic behavioral and social research theories and findings into practical policy alternatives. The Institute will be expected to maintain a dissemination system of periodic newsletters, research papers,

academic and/or trade journal articles, and occasional books. In addition, the Institute will be expected to organize conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, and/or other ways of sharing current research activities and findings. The Institute will hold a biennial conference on issues related to disability policy. The Institute will also have the responsibility for publishing a book composed of papers delivered at the biennial conference.

Applicants are encouraged to propose the use of creative methods of disseminating data and information, such as using the Internet. Applications should show sensitivity to alternative dissemination strategies which may be appropriate for different audiences--such as policymakers, practitioners, the public, advocates, and academics. The research and dissemination will be nonpartisan and of value to all levels of policymaking. SSA reserves the right to review and concur on all publications created using Institute funding before they are published.

c. Training and education The DRI is expected to both train new scholars and educate academics and practitioners on new techniques and research findings on issues of disability policy that impact the economic security of persons with disabilities. The Institute is expected to develop and expand a diverse corps of scholars/researchers who focus their analytical skills on research and policy issues central to the Institute's mission. Training mechanisms should include seminar series, conferences, graduate courses, and mini-courses to be held in both Baltimore/Washington D.C. and the DRI site.

The Institute is expected to financially support the development and work of new scholars. For example, funding should be allocated to support graduate students, as research assistants and through research grants; Ph.D. candidates, through dissertation grants; and other research scholars through post-doctoral and visiting appointments. Additionally, the Institute will conduct training seminars for government analysts and policymakers on the Institute's research findings and

methodological advancements. Training exchanges between the Institute and government researchers should also be anticipated.

To assure the quality of its research, dissemination, and training, the Institute must establish and maintain a formal tie with a university, including links with appropriate departments within that university. The Institute must have a major presence at a single site (university or city); however, alternative arrangements among entities and with individual scholars are encouraged and may be proposed.

d. Facilitation of data usage SSA has been seeking ways to make administrative and other data more available to the research community. Such efforts are resource intensive and must adhere to clear privacy protection requirements. The DRI will work as an external resource to facilitate this objective. Specific areas in which the DRI should contribute include: writing papers that further efforts to effectively combine data sharing and data privacy; developing documentation for administrative files; aiding researchers in obtaining administrative extracts for policy-relevant research projects; developing sophisticated statistical techniques to mask micro data; aiding SSA staff in developing methodology and policy regarding linkages of administrative data with outside data sources; and providing, with SSA assistance, public use files that rely on data aggregates that cannot be used to identify individuals. In addition, it is SSA's goal to increase the sites at which outside researchers can use administrative data.

Without compromising academic freedom, Institute staff will be expected to comply with special requests for administrative confidentiality in specific sensitive situations. The Institute shall make reasonable efforts to provide other researchers appropriate and speedy access to research data from this project and establish public use files of data developed under this award.

The Institute is expected to work in conjunction with SSA and other Federal agencies and appropriate organizations to help develop mechanisms that enable additional sites to satisfy the legal and privacy requirements for outside researchers, who agree to specific privacy protections, to be able to access restricted-use data files.

2. SSA Responsibilities: SSA will be involved with the Institute in jointly establishing broad research priorities, planning strategies, and deliverable dates to accomplish the objectives of this announcement. SSA, or its representatives, will provide the following types of support to the Institute:

- a. Consultation and technical assistance in planning, operating and evaluating the Institute's program activities. SSA intends to form an internal Technical Assistance Panel that will review and concur with all of the Institute's submissions/deliverables prior to implementation and/or publication.
- b. Information about SSA programs, policies, and research priorities.
- c. Assistance in identifying SSA information and technical assistance resources pertinent to the Institute's success.
- d. Review of Institute activities and collegial feedback to ensure that objectives and award conditions are being met.

SSA may suspend or terminate any cooperative agreement in whole or in part at any time before the date of expiration. Suspension or termination could occur if the awardee materially fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement, if technical performance requirements are not met, or if the project is no longer relevant to the Agency. SSA will promptly

notify the awardee in writing of the determination and the reasons for suspension or termination together with the effective date.

SSA reserves the right to suspend funding for individual projects in process or in previously approved research areas or tasks after awards have been granted.

SSA encourages cooperative agreement applicants to become knowledgeable about SSA's operations as well as entitlements under its programs. Pamphlets and other public information may be obtained from any local Social Security field office or by calling 1-800-772-1213.

3. Joint Responsibilities

Jointly with SSA, the Institute will select approximately six nationally recognized scholars and practitioners who are unaffiliated with the Institute to provide assistance in formulating the Institute's research agenda and advice on implementation. The Institute shall select three scholars/practitioners and SSA will select three scholars/practitioners. Efforts will be made in selecting the scholars/practitioners to assure a range of perspectives, and a variety of substantive viewpoints. The SSA Project Officer or some other SSA representative will participate in all meetings. Funded under this agreement, the scholars/practitioners will meet once or twice a year rotating between the Baltimore MD/Washington, D.C. areas, and the Institute location.

C. Special Requirements

The Institute Director must have a demonstrated capability to organize, administer, and direct the Institute. The Director will be responsible for the organization and operation of the Institute and for communication with SSA on scientific and operational matters. The Director must also have a minimum time commitment of 30 percent to the DRI Cooperative Agreement. Racial/ethnic

minority individuals, women, and persons with disabilities should be encouraged to apply as the Director. A list of previous grants and cooperative agreements held by the Director shall be submitted. Administrator names and contact information for each grant and/or cooperative agreement shall also be submitted.

In addition to the Director, skilled personnel and institutional resources capable of providing a strong research and evaluation base in the priority areas specified must be available. The university and pertinent departments must show a strong commitment to the Institute's support. Such commitment may be provided as dedicated space, salary support for investigators or key personnel, dedicated equipment or other financial support for the proposed Institute.

The Institute should be conceptualized and defined by its integrative, multi-disciplinary nature and need not be limited by geographical or departmental boundaries. A research team may consist of investigators or institutions that are geographically distant, to the extent that the research design requires and accommodates such arrangements. Nothing in this announcement precludes non-academic entities from being affiliated with an applicant.

PART III--APPLICATION PREPARATION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

This part contains information on the preparation of an application for submission under this announcement, the forms necessary for submission and the evaluation criteria under which the applications will be scored. Potential applicants should read this part carefully in conjunction with the information provided in Part II.

In general, SSA seeks organizations with demonstrated capacity for providing quality policy research and evaluation, training, and working with government policymakers. Applicants should reflect, in the Program Narrative section of the application, how they will be able to fulfill the responsibilities and the requirements described in the announcement. The application should specify in detail how administrative arrangements will be made to minimize start-up and transition delays. Applications which do not address all four major tasks discussed in Institute Responsibilities in Part II will not be considered for an award.

It is anticipated that the applicant will have access to additional sources of funding for some projects and arrangements with other organizations and institutions. Funds from other sources cannot be applied toward the awardee's matching share of the total approved cost of the project. The applicant (including the Institute Director and other key personnel) shall make all current and anticipated related funding arrangements (including contact information for grant/contract/cooperative agreement administrators) explicit in an attachment to the application (Part IV, Section B-12). As part of the annual review process, this information will be updated and reviewed to limit duplicitous funding for Institute projects.

A. Content and Organization of Technical Application (See "Components of a Complete Application," Part IV, Section B)

The application must begin with the required application forms and a three-page (double-spaced) overview and summary of the application. Staff resumes should be included in a separate

appendix. The core of the application must contain eight sections, presented in the following order:

(1) A brief (not more than 10 pages) background analysis of the key disability policy issues and trends with a focus on the primary research themes of the proposed Institute. The analysis should discuss concisely, but comprehensively, important priority research issues and demonstrate the applicant's grasp of the policy and research significance of recent and future social, economic, political, and demographic trends.

(2) A research and evaluation prospectus for a five-year research agenda, outlining the major research themes to be investigated over the next five years. In particular, the prospectus will describe the activities planned for the priority research areas and other additional research topics proposed by the applicant. The prospectus should discuss the kind of research activities that are needed to anticipate future policy debates on SSDI and SSI and the role of the proposed Institute in promoting those activities. The prospectus should follow from the Background Analysis section. It may, of course, also discuss research areas and issues that were not mentioned in the analysis if the author(s) of the application feel there have been gaps in past research, or that new factors have begun to affect or soon will begin to affect national disability policy.

The prospectus shall include detailed descriptions of individual research projects that will be expected in the Institute's first year of operation. It also should be specific about long-term research themes and projects. The areas of research described in the prospectus should be concrete enough that project descriptions in subsequent research plan amendments can be viewed as articulating a research theme discussed in the prospectus. An application that contains simply an ad hoc categorization of an unstructured set of research projects--as opposed to a set of projects which strike a coherent theme--will be judged unfavorably.

Note: Once a successful applicant and the outside scholars/practitioners have been selected, they and SSA will review the research agenda and determine research priorities. This may include the addition, limitation, or removal of proposed research projects. After review, the Institute will submit to SSA a revised research plan that summarizes the deliberations and priorities. The research plan will be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary. The application should discuss a proposed research planning process, including involvements of the outside scholars/practitioners, SSA, and other advisors and participants in the Institute.

(3) A prospectus for dissemination should include proposed mechanisms for reaching a broad audience of academics and researchers, policymakers, and the public. Dissemination plans should detail proposed publications, conferences, workshops, and training seminars.

(4) A prospectus for training and education should include proposed training and educational strategies to meet the goals described in Part II, Section A, Task 3.

(5) A prospectus for facilitation of data usage demonstrating a broad knowledge of administrative data and the legal and institutional constraints facing public data release. In addition, it should include a discussion of the technical expertise of Institute staff and proposed mechanisms to facilitate the sharing of data.

(6) A staffing and organization proposal for the Institute including an analysis of the types of background needed among staff members, the Institute's organizational structure, and linkages with other organizations. In this section, the applicant should specify how they will assure a genuinely multi-disciplinary approach to research, and where appropriate, identify the necessary links to university departments, other organizations and scholars engaged in research and government policymaking.

The applicant should identify the Institute Director and key senior research staff. Full resumes of proposed staff members shall be included as a separate appendix to the application. The time commitment to the Institute and other commitments for each proposed staff member shall be indicated. Note that once the cooperative agreement has been awarded, changes in key staff will require approval from SSA. The kinds of administrative and tenure arrangements, if any, the Institute proposes to make should also be discussed in this section. In addition, the author(s) of the application and the role which he/she (they) will play in the proposed Institute must be specified.

This section should discuss the financial arrangements for supporting research assistants, dissertation fellowships, affiliates, resident scholars, etc. The discussion should include the expected number and type of scholars to be supported and the level of support anticipated.

If the applicant envisions an arrangement of several universities or entities, this section should describe the specifics about the relationships, including leadership, management, and administration. They should pay particular attention to discussing how a focal point for research, teaching, and scholarship will be maintained given the arrangement proposed.

The application should also discuss the role, selection procedure, and expected contribution of the outside scholars/practitioners (See Part II, Joint Responsibilities).

(7) An organizational experience summary of past work at the university or institution proposed as the location (or the host) of the Institute that relates directly or indirectly to the research priorities of this request. This discussion should include more than a listing of the individual projects completed by the individuals who are included in the application. It should provide a sense of institutional commitment to policy research on issues involving disability policy. Where specific individuals are proposed for the staff of the Institute, it is legitimate to discuss their past research, whether or not it took place at the institution proposed to be the location of the Institute.

The application must list in an appendix appropriate recent or current research projects, with a brief research summary, contact person references, and address and telephone numbers of references.

This section should also discuss the experience of the research staff in working with the government agencies and their demonstrated capacity to provide policy-relevant support to these agencies.

(8) A budget narrative which links the research, training, dissemination, and data-facilitation program to the Institute's funding level. The budget should, to the degree possible, offer separate cost estimates for the individual research areas and projects proposed in the research prospectus. Funding should also be allocated to address occasional SSA requested activities (described in Part II, Section B-1). This section should also discuss how the five-year budget supports proposed research, training, dissemination, and data-facilitation activities and should link the first year of funding to a five-year plan. The discussion should include the appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to the successful completion of the research, training, and dissemination plans.

The availability, potential availability or expectation of other funds (from the host university, other universities, foundations, other Federal agencies, etc.) and the uses to which they would be put, should be documented in this section. When additional funding is contemplated, applicants shall note whether the funding is being donated by the host institution, is in-hand from another funding source, or will be applied for from another funding source. Formal commitments for the 5 percent, non-federal, minimum budget share should be highlighted in this section.

Seeking additional support from other sources is encouraged. However, funds pertaining to this announcement must not directly duplicate those received from other funding sources.

B. Review Process and Funding

In addition to any other reviews, an independent review panel consisting of approximately eight qualified persons will be formed. Each panelist will objectively review and score the cooperative agreement applications using the evaluation criteria listed in Part III, Section C below. The panel will recommend to SSA a Disability Research Institute based on (1) the application scores; (2) the feasibility and adequacy of the project plan and methodology; and (3) how the Institute would meet SSA's disability policy-relevant objectives.

The Commissioner of Social Security will consider the panel's recommendations when awarding the cooperative agreement. Although the results from the independent panel reviews are the primary factor used in making funding decisions, they are not the sole basis for making awards. The Commissioner will consider other factors as well (such as duplication of internal and external research efforts) when making funding decisions. All applicants must use the guidelines provided in the SSA application kit for preparing applications requesting funding under this cooperative agreement announcement. These guidelines describe the minimum amount of required project information. However, when completing Part III--Program Narrative, Form SSA-96-BK, please follow the guidelines under Part III, Section A, above. Please disregard the Program Narrative instructions provided on pages 3, 4, and 5 of the SSA Federal Assistance Application Form SSA-96-BK.

All awardees must adhere to SSA's Privacy and Confidentiality Regulations (20 CFR, part 401) as well as provide specific safeguards surrounding client information sharing, paper/computer records/data, and other issues potentially arising from administrative data.

SSA reserves the option to discuss applications with other Federal or State staff, specialists, knowledgeable persons, and the general public. Comments from these sources, along with those of the reviewers, will be kept from inappropriate disclosure and may be considered in making an award decision.

C. Selection Process and Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria correspond to the outline for the development of the Program Narrative Statement of the application described in Part III, Section A, above. The application should be prepared in the format indicated by the outline described in The Components of a Complete Application (i.e., Part IV, Section B).

Selection of the successful applicant will be based on the technical and financial criteria laid out in this announcement. Reviewers will determine the strengths and weaknesses of each application in terms of the evaluation criteria listed below.

The point value following each criterion heading indicates the maximum numerical relative weight that each section will be given in the review process. An unacceptable rating on any individual criterion may render the application unacceptable. Consequently, applicants should take care that all criteria are fully addressed in the applications. Applications will be reviewed as follows:

- (a) Quality of the background analysis. (See Part III, Section A-1) (10 points)

Applications will be judged on whether they provide a thoughtful and coherent discussion of political, economic, social, demographic, medical and health-related trends influencing disability. Reviewers will judge applicants' abilities to discuss the past, present, and future role of government

programs and policies which affect these trends. Applications should tie the trends and influences discussed to their proposed research agenda.

(b) Quality of the research and evaluation prospectus. (See Part III, Section A-2) (30 points)

Reviewers will judge this section on whether the research agenda is scientifically sound and policy relevant. They also will consider whether the applicant is likely to produce significant/seminal contributions to their proposed research areas and how closely the proposed projects fit the objectives for which the applications were solicited.

The application will be judged on the breadth and depth of the applicant's commitment to research and evaluation of the priority areas described in Part II, Section A. The discussion and research proposed must address at least one priority research area. Applicants will generally receive higher scores for addressing more than one priority research area. However, a strong proposal focusing on one area will outscore one that is broad and weakly defined. Applicants with additional insightful research proposals will also score higher. Concise plans for research projects in the near term (one or two years) as well as a five-year agenda are important.

Reviewers will rate applications on the contents of the plans to conduct policy-relevant research. In addition, they will be judged on their relevance to government activities. Reviewers will also take into consideration SSA priorities and funded or anticipated projects.

(c) Dissemination; training and education; and facilitation of data usage. (See Part III, Section A-3, A-4, and A-5) (20 points)

Reviewers will evaluate strategies for dissemination of research and other related information to a broad and disparate set of academic, research, and policy communities as well as to the public. Reviewers will also evaluate whether the appropriate dissemination method is being proposed for targeted audiences of academics and researchers, policymakers, and the public. Proposed strategies

that increase dissemination across other organizations conducting disability income research will also receive higher ratings.

The evaluation of the training and evaluation prospectus will include an assessment of plans to enhance the training of graduate students and young scholars through direct financial support as well as exposure to policy research. In addition, reviewers will evaluate proposed strategies for educating and training policymakers and practitioners on issues of disability.

The scoring of the prospectus for facilitation of data usage will include a review of the activities planned as well as staff and management expertise and experience. Applicants should also demonstrate an understanding of the legal and institutional constraints involved with SSA administrative, earnings, and tax data.

(d) Quality of the staffing proposal and proposed organizational arrangements. (See Part III, Section A-6 and A-7) (30 points)

Reviewers will judge the applicant's Institute Director and staff on research experience, demonstrated research skills, administrative skills, public administration experience, and relevant policy-making skills. An additional criterion will be the Institute's demonstrated potential to act as a conduit between basic and applied behavioral and social science research and policy analysis/evaluation. Both the evidence of past involvement in related research and the specific plans for seeking applied outcomes described in the application shall be considered part of that potential. Reviewers may consider references from grant/cooperative agreement administrators on previous grants and cooperative agreements held by the proposed Institute Director or other key personnel. Director and staff time commitments to the Institute also will be a factor in evaluation. Whether the applicant can maintain a single location for research, teaching, and scholarship is an important consideration. Reviewers will evaluate the affiliations of proposed key personnel to

ensure the required multi-disciplinary nature of the Institute is being fulfilled. Higher scores will generally be given to those institutions which include active participation by a multi-disciplinary research staff. Furthermore, reviewers will rate the applicant's pledge and ability to work in collaboration with other scholars and government employees in search of similar goals.

Applicants will be judged on the nature and extent of the organizational support for research, mentoring scholars, dissemination, facilitation of data usage, and in areas related to the institution's central priorities and this request. Reviewers will evaluate the commitment of the host institution (and the proposed institutional unit that will contain the Institute) to assess its ability to support all four of the Institute's major activities: (1) scholarly, policy-relevant research; (2) dissemination; (3) education and training; and (4) facilitation of data usage. Reviewers also will evaluate the applicant's demonstrated capacity to work with a range of government agencies.

(e) Appropriations of the budget to carry out the planned staffing and activities. (See Part III, Section A-8) (10 points)

Reviewers will consider whether (1) the budget assures an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of this announcement, and (2) the applicant has additional funding from other sources, in particular, the host institution. Applications that show funding from other sources that supplement funds for this cooperative agreement will be given higher marks than those without financial support.

PART IV--APPLICATION FORMS, COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION

A. Availability of Application Forms

To obtain an application kit that contains the prescribed forms for funding projects under this announcement, all requests should be submitted via mail, fax, or e-mail. MAIL: Grants Management Team, Office of Acquisition and Grants, Social Security Administration, 1-E-4 Gwynn Oak Building, 1710 Gwynn Oak Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21207-5279. FAX: (410) 966-9310 or (410) 966-1261. E-MAIL: joe.smith@ssa.gov or dave.allshouse@ssa.gov or gary.stammar@ssa.gov.

Requests submitted by mail should include a return address label. To assist us, please provide the information requested using the following format:

REQUESTOR:

Name

Telephone Number

MAIL TO:

Name (individual)

Organization

Street Address

City State Zip Code

When requesting an application kit, the applicant should refer to the program announcement number SSA-ORES-00-1 and the date of this announcement to ensure receipt of the proper application kit.

B. Components of a Complete Application

A complete application package consists of one original, signed and dated application, plus at least two copies, which include the following items in order:

1. Cover Sheet;
2. Project Abstract/Summary (not to exceed three pages);
3. Table of Contents;
4. Part I (Face Sheet)--Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424);
5. Part II--Budget Information--Sections A through G (Form SSA-96-BK);
6. Budget Justification (Details) for Section B--Budget Categories;
7. Proof of non-profit status, if applicable;
8. Copy of the applicant's approved indirect cost rate agreement, if appropriate;
9. Part III--Project (Program) Narrative. Please disregard instructions provided on pages 3, 4, and 5 of the SSA Federal Assistance Application Form SSA-96-BK. The program narrative should be organized in eight sections:
 - (a) Background Analysis,
 - (b) Research and Evaluation Prospectus,
 - (c) Dissemination Prospectus,
 - (d) Training and Education Prospectus,

- (e) Facilitation of Data Usage Prospectus,
- (f) Staffing Proposal Including Staff Utilization and Staff Background,
- (g) Organizational Experience Summary, and
- (h) Budget Narrative.

10. Part IV--Assurances;

11. Additional Assurances/Certifications;

12. Any appendices/attachments; and

13. Supplement to Section II--Key Personnel.

Staple each copy of the application securely (front and back if necessary) in the upper left corner.

Please DO NOT use or include separate covers, binders, clips, tabs, plastic inserts, books, brochures, videos, or any other items that cannot be readily photocopied.

C. Application Submission

These guidelines should be followed in submitting applications:

--All applications requesting SSA funds for cooperative agreement projects under this announcement must be submitted on the standard forms provided in the application kit. NOTE: Facsimile copies will not be accepted.

--The application shall be executed by an individual authorized to act for the applicant organization and to assume for the applicant organization the obligations imposed by the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement award.

--Number of copies: The package should contain one original, signed and dated application plus at least two copies. Ten additional copies are optional and will expedite processing of the application. A disk copy of the Abstract and the Program Narrative (in Word 97 format) would also be helpful to SSA, but is optional.

--Length: Applications should be brief and concise as possible, but assure successful communication of the applicant's proposal to the reviewers. The Project Narrative portion of the application (Part III) may not exceed 150 double spaced pages (excluding the resume and outside funding appendices), typewritten on one side using standard (8 1/2" x 11") size paper and 12 point font. Attachments that support the project narrative count within the 150 page limit. Attachments not applicable to the project narrative do not count toward this page limit.

--Attachments/Appendices, when included, should be used only to provide supporting documentation. Brochures, videos, etc., should not be included because they are not easily reproduced and are therefore inaccessible to reviewers.

--In item 11 of the Face Sheet (SF 424), the applicant must clearly indicate the application submitted is in response to this announcement (SSA-ORES-00-1). The applicant also is encouraged to select a SHORT descriptive project title.

--On all applications developed jointly by more than one organization, the application must identify only one university as the lead organization and the official applicant. The other(s) can be included as co-participants, subgrantees or subcontractors.

Applications must be mailed or hand delivered to: Grants Management Team, Office of Acquisition and Grants, DCFAM, Social Security Administration, Attention: SSA-ORES-00-1, 1-E-4 Gwynn Oak Building, 1710 Gwynn Oak Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21207-5279.

Hand-delivered applications are accepted between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday. An application will be considered as meeting the deadline if it is either:

1. Received at the above address on or before the deadline date; or
2. Mailed through the U.S. Postal Service or sent by commercial carrier on or before the deadline date and received in time to be considered during the competitive review and evaluation process. Packages must be postmarked by (insert date 90 days after date of publication in the Federal Register). Applicants are cautioned to request a legibly dated U.S. Postal Service postmark or to obtain a legibly dated receipt from a commercial carrier as evidence of timely mailing.

Applications that do not meet the above criteria are considered late applications. SSA will not waive or extend the deadline for any applicant unless the deadline is waived or extended for all applicants. SSA will notify each late applicant that its application will not be considered.

D. Notification

SSA will use Form SSA-3966 PC (a double postcard) to acknowledge receipt of application forms. Please complete the top and bottom parts of the double postcard, which is included in the application kit, and, on the franked side of the postcard, enter the name and address of the person to whom the acknowledgment is to be sent. Include Form SSA-3966 PC with the original copy of the application forms. If you do not receive acknowledgment of your application within eight weeks after the deadline date, please notify SSA.

Paperwork Reduction Act

This notice contains reporting requirements. However, the information is collected using a Federal Assistance Application Form SSA-96-BK, which has the Office of Management and Budget clearance number 0960-0184.

Executive Order 12372 and 12416--Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs

This program is not covered by the requirements of Executive Order 12372, as amended by Executive Order 12416, relating to the Federal policy for consulting with State and local elected officials on proposed Federal financial assistance.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance: Program No. 96.007, Social Security--Research and Demonstration)

Dated:

Kenneth S. Apfel
Commissioner of Social Security